

Alameda County Jail Offers Parenting Education

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Alameda County's program, Teaching and Loving Kinds (T.A.L.K.), consists of parenting classes and contact visits between incarcerated mothers and their children

The parenting class curriculum addresses the incarcerated parent and the special problems of their children. It is designed to rid the child of the guilt often seen in children of incarcerated parents and to strengthen, or sometimes to begin, the bond between mother and child.

The visitation portion of the program brings to life what is taught in the parenting classes. It provides time for the children to have quality time with their mothers-to play, read, or just sit and talk together. During

birth to twelve years of age. Four thousand dollars purchased all equipment, supplies, toys, and games, which are designed for joint participation.

These visitation periods are often the first time a child has been alone with his or her mother. They provide an opportunity for the child to learn that he/she is loved and that it is not his/her fault that the mother is in jail.

Another important benefit to the program is that it improves the relationship between children and law enforcement. A uniformed deputy sheriff is with the children during the visitation time, which makes the child see the police in a positive light.

Problems Addressed by the Program

In 1989, the Alameda County Sheriff's Department moved more **than 2,500** inmates from an old, dilapidated jail into a modern, state-of-the-art facility. The old jail, a World War II army barracks, was not conducive

There seems to be a hereditary chain of incarceration among many families. This cycle must stop. A first step is to provide stability in the lives of the children, who are often left with a grandmother, an aunt, or whoever will take care of them while their mother is in jail. The T.A.L.K. program's main objective is to keep them from following in their mother's footsteps.

NIC Funding Supports Program Development

The Los Angeles County Jail system began a program similar to T.A.L.K. about three years ago. Alameda County applied for and received a technical assistance grant through the National Institute of Corrections (NIC), which enabled us to visit and observe the Los Angeles program. We spoke with those who had developed the program as well as with the security staff about benefits of the program and its problems. We gathered valuable information to provide the groundwork for Alameda County's program.

The grant also made it possible for Los Angeles County to send two program administrators from their Sybil Brand Institution for Women to our facility. This visit helped us make significant progress in developing our program and identifying portions of the Los Angeles program appropriate to our facility and

The first step in breaking a possible hereditary chain of incarceration is to provide stability in the lives of the children of incarcerated women.

these times the jail gymnasium is transformed into a nursery room/playground setting for children from

one of the new, productive programs for the new facility.

T.A.L.K. The Sybil Brand program had also been in operation long enough to have statistics that proved the benefit of the program to both parents and children.

County Role

Alameda County received support for the program from the Probation Department, judges, and local groups concerned with the needs of female offenders.

A deputy sheriff assigned to develop the program worked closely with those in the Los Angeles program. Las Positas College agreed to fund the two program instructors who were to conduct the parenting class and visitation. Once the instructors were on board, they worked with the deputy in selecting equipment, supplies, games, and toys for the mother/child visits.

The Inmate Services Manager oversees the program. The deputy now works eight hours on the day of the visit and five hours another day during the week processing inmate applications, ordering supplies, and keeping an inventory.

Results

The results of the T.A.L.K. program are all positive.

- The women inmates in the program have improved their behavior in the jail to avoid disciplinary problems that would keep them from attending the classes and visiting with their children.

- The children's caregivers have reported that the children are less nervous at home after visiting their mothers and their behavior has improved.
- Inmates have shown a real interest in their children, some for the first time. Some have initiated a self-help group on being released and have asked the instructors for assistance.
- There have been positive changes in the attitudes of some of the children toward the deputies.
- The National Association of Counties awarded our program its 1991 Achievement Award.

The T.A.L.K. program has been wonderful for the Alameda County Jail's relations with the public. The media have consistently provided positive coverage of this unique program.

The most important results, of course, can come **only when we finally see that the children have grown up and avoided the correctional system altogether.**

For further information, contact Charles Barry, Inmate Services Manager, or Deputy Lin Otey, Alameda County Sheriff's Department, 5325 Broder Boulevard, Dublin, California, 94568.

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